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Seventy-second session

9th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 20 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Address by Mr. Lenin Moreno Garcés, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador.

Mr. Lenin Moreno Garcés, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Lenin Moreno Garcés, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Moreno Garcés (*spoke in Spanish*): As I speak from this rostrum today, I can affirm that much progress has been made to achieve inclusion and accessibility; however, as a society we still have much that remains to be done for the world's 1 billion people living with disabilities. I am an optimist. We are entirely capable of finding solutions; it is a matter of political will. That is why I am grateful for the accommodations that have been made to enable me to address the General Assembly today.

I congratulate the President, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, for proposing the topic for the general debate, namely,"Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Those are truly today's imperatives. Without a doubt, a responsible Government must take care of its citizens so that all of them may have a decent life on a sustainable planet where every day we work towards achieving peace.

Our Government philosophy agrees that we must care for our citizens throughout their lives, from the moment of conception to when God decides to close our eyes. We must ensure a good life and a good death. That is why we have organized the Government's work around a plan that we have called "A Whole Life". A responsible country and Government must care for, inspire, encourage, support and be good to its citizens throughout their entire lives under the principle of co-responsibility.

Taking care of citizens begins with prenatal services. After birth, we need to provide medical care for the child, appropriate nutrition, vaccinations, neonatal screening and early intervention. Then comes the stage when we must inspire the new human being and foster their love for science, knowledge, art and sports to shape their will and mind, thereby awakening their consciousness and planting the seeds of the values within them that will serve as the basis for their adult life. In the next stage of life, it is crucial for us to propel our young people forward with an education — a high quality higher education — facilitating in that way the fulfilment of their endeavours, projects and dreams. Beyond that stage, we must provide support to individuals with a view to ensuring the well-being of their families — the right to social security, housing,

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employment, recreation and a safe and healthy environment. At the end comes the stage of gratitude when we give back to the people who have served their societies and families — the care and services that we provide to our senior citizens.

Within that vision of ensuring the rights of each individual throughout their entire life, there persists an urgent need to eradicate all forms of violence. Today all of humankind has a moral and ethical duty — we must prohibit the abuse and killing of thousands of women and girls. There can be no more femicides, not even one. Our "A Whole Life" plan is, in sum, how we in Ecuador have interpreted our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. We unquestionably inherited the notion from our indigenous peoples that the world must be focused on the human being and their relationship to nature, in which the beginning and the end is to meet the needs of all and make possible a life with dignity. My indigenous brothers and sisters taught me that we were born to be happy, and it is upon that premise that we must govern, live, manage and act.

However, we must also recognize that we are experiencing a difficult and painful time as human beings. We are facing many crises. We see a potential nuclear conflict, greater levels of inequality and poverty and a planet that must fight the devastating effects of climate change. If we continue along such a path, there is no doubt that we are moving towards destruction. Clearly that is evidence of the fact that we, the human race, are failing. We must commit to achieving peace. Consistent with that need, today Ecuador is acceding to the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. We call on all countries to accede to that historic international instrument.

We know that the military industry is a big business, which is why arms traffickers, and not arms producers, are prosecuted and convicted. What ethics are at play here? How is it possible that resources that could be devoted to financing the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals are wasted on the absurdity of war?

We firmly believe that peace and development are achieved through dialogue; but if we continue with wars and blockades against countries and peoples, such as the blockade against our brother country Cuba, we will never be able to achieve true liberty and democracy. We therefore insist that the sovereignty of States and non-intervention must be respected. We call for dialogue as a mechanism to resolve differences around the globe, with full respect for international law.

Military intervention is not the answer, as it only brings with it suffering, pain and death. We therefore resolutely support the peace talks that the Government of Colombia is holding in our country with the National Liberation Army. We welcome the agreement reached in Quito, which was announced a few days ago, for a bilateral temporary ceasefire in Columbia. Step-by-step we are nearing the goal of having the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States become a region of peace.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, we have before us another major challenge — the alarming inequality in the world. It is unacceptable for eight people in the world to possess the same wealth as one half of humankind's poorest. Such injustice goes against the rights to development and human dignity. A way to immediately confront inequality would be to institute fair tax measures. We must fight tax evasion and avoidance: those hidden resources are vital for the development of our countries.

Furthermore, the use of tax shelters has served to hide corruption within both the public and the private sectors. If we truly want to fight corruption, we must encourage a culture of transparency. In our country, by popular agreement, the people of Ecuador decided that no public servant can have resources or goods in tax havens. As Chair of the Group of 77 and China, Ecuador has promoted a global agenda for fair tax actions. We reiterate the need to create an intergovernmental body on tax cooperation at the United Nations. Another mechanism for promoting transparency would be a binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights. We appreciate the support of all countries that share our views on such an initiative.

Looking at the devastation caused by climatic phenomena in recent weeks, I would be remiss if I did not express my solidarity with the peoples affected and turn to address one of the greatest challenges that humankind faces, that is, the responsibility to combat climate change. We must take care of our common home and ensure the survival of the planet. The unlimited exploitation of the environment has led us to live with the consequences of climate change. We, the developing countries, are those that pay the highest costs. Countries have common but differentiated responsibilities. Those who pollute the most must take greater responsibility.

As the Assembly knows, Ecuador is one of the eight Amazonian countries. Having been born and raised in the Ecuadorian Amazon, I have a duty to promote the protection of the largest hydrographic basin in the world. In the dialogue convened by the Secretary-General, I presented the Amazon initiative to stop deforestation and combat climate change. We advocate compliance with all international agreements for the protection of nature, including the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans. We encourage bioknowledge and the bioeconomy. We must protect and make the most of the knowledge of the guardians of nature, in particular indigenous peoples, communities and nations.

I would like to refer to another issue of enormous importance for today's world, namely, the migration crisis. Ecuador supports the principle of universal citizenship and free mobility, because we are increasingly interconnected, and the right to free mobility cannot be applied only to capital and goods. Human mobility enriches peoples and contributes to combating all forms of discrimination and xenophobia. We strongly support the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, which is being discussed here in the Assembly. Closing borders is not the solution. It has never been the solution in the history of humankind.

When I formed my Government, I called for major national dialogue, without excluding anyone, in order to reach agreements that would allow us to build a more humane, just and democratic society. Dialogue is the only tool for building societies of peace. That means societies with jobs, high-quality education, access to health care as a right, decent housing and access to basic services. Through dialogue, democracy is built, which is both a means of moving forward and our final goal.

Democracy is strengthened by generating and promoting spaces for young people to participate in politics. We have an obligation to generate new leadership so that they can take our place when the time comes. We must maintain the defence of fundamental liberties, including those of expression and worship. We must promote a new international order based on peace, respect for differences, equality and solidarity.

We do not want merely compassionate societies, but rather societies that feature solidarity. That is why we need fundamental love for others, honesty and a sense of community. Faced with the failure of a development model based on accumulation, inequality and war, we can, and must, foster a new society based on the construction of the common good. All countries can achieve development with equity, if we have a fair international system and if we commit ourselves to the eradication of poverty and inequality.

Our challenges are great, but I am convinced that we are capable of overcoming them. My deep optimism lies in the confidence that dialogue, political decision-making and collective action will enable us to build a more humane and more just world in which we can live with dignity.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lenín Moreno Garcés, Constitutional President of the Republic of Ecuador, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Ms. Gabriela Michetti Illia, Vice-President of the Argentine Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Argentine Republic.

Ms. Gabriela Michetti Illia, Vice-President of the Argentine Republic, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming Her Excellency Ms. Gabriela Michetti Illia, Vice-President of the Argentine Republic, and inviting her to address the Assembly.

Ms. Michetti Illia (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am very honoured and very happy to be here today representing my country and my Government.

As an Argentine and a Latin American, I cannot begin my statement without first expressing my solidarity and the solidarity of Argentina with those afflicted by the tragic earthquake in Mexico, which adds to the devastation caused by successive hurricanes in the Caribbean. The environment and the forces of nature are speaking to us and presenting us with challenges.

I would also like to congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election and on his renewed commitment to the task of focusing our responsibilities as

Governments on people. I believe that that is our most important mission. If the international community is striving for peace, dialogue and understanding, and if we working against poverty, violence and intolerance, Argentina will always be there to offer its support.

The leaders of the world have agreed on a plan of action in favour of people and the planet, namely, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which stipulates that the eradication of poverty in all its forms is the greatest challenge facing the world in its efforts to achieve sustainable development. In keeping with that global aspiration, our Government has established as one of the central axes of its programme the goal of moving decisively towards zero poverty. As a sign of that commitment at the international level, Argentina presented its first voluntary national review of its implementation of the 2030 Agenda in July.

We in Argentina are working to create a country where there is equal opportunity for all. That is why we are also focusing on the creation of jobs and inclusive education. On that note, it is worth mentioning that we will host the fourth Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour in November, where we will tackle issues such as the eradication of forced labour and the promotion of high-quality youth employment. A debate on the future of work goes hand in hand with empowering our young people through high-quality education. We dream of a world where a child's destiny and a young person's future have no limits other than their talent, intelligence, determination, will power and desire to succeed in life.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a State policy of Argentina that has been sustained since we recovered our democracy in 1983. In that vein, we have been working closely with other actors in the regional and international systems for this to be effective. I take this opportunity to reiterate that our country has presented its candidacy for membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2020. We count on members' support.

One of Argentina's priorities is to ensure gender equality. We believe that it is important to educate our communities with the aim of eliminating the various forms of hidden violence within our society. For that reason, our Government has committed to implementing programmes that eliminate gender violence and achieve the full empowerment of women and girls, including their political and economic autonomy, within the framework of our first national plan of action for the prevention, assistance and eradication of violence against women.

Our Government has placed special emphasis on the commitments made along with the international community in the framework of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which was incorporated into our Constitution in 2014. In taking ownership of the spirit of Convention, we have established an agency that focuses on policymaking for disabled persons. The design and implementation of a national plan is essential in terms of participation and working together with disabled persons. As that is an issue that I am personally involved in, I commit to working tirelessly to ensure that the national plan covers all areas referred to in the Convention. From my own perspective as a person with an acquired disability, I wish to express here in the Hall the deep commitment that both President Macri and I have to changing the distorted view held by our culture towards disability.

I would also like to mention the global problem of drugs, which knows no limits or borders. We must cooperate and unite our efforts in order to confront it. The fight against drug trafficking is another of our President's three main policies: we must redouble our international commitments to tackle that scourge. In Argentina we are working in that vein to find a consensus that will enable us to create an international court against organized crime in our region of Latin America.

It is with sadness that I refer to the situation that our sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is facing. On 8 August, 12 States of Americas met in Lima to condemn the rupture in the democratic order and the systematic violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the violence, repression, political persecution, the existence of political prisoners and lack of free elections in that country. It pains me to speak such words about a kindred country that is so dear to Argentina, and so, from this rostrum, I call for credible negotiations in good faith, building on a consensus of the parties that is oriented towards the peaceful re-establishment of democracy in Venezuela.

The Government of Argentina once again reiterates its condemnation of terrorism in all its forms. I wish to convey the condolences of our people to the victims of that scourge and their families. We know all too well

what we speak of: my country has directly suffered from terrorism, having been the victim of two major attacks on the city of Buenos Aires, one in 1992 against the Embassy of Israel and then in 1994 against the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) headquarters.

I wish to reiterate the will of the Republic of Argentina to bring to justice all those who participated in the financing, planning, preparation and execution of those terrorist attacks. The continued investigation of the attack on AMIA calls for the appearance of the accused at a hearing. We do not want another 20 years to pass without justice being served. That is why we call on the international community to support us in our requests for cooperation from the Islamic Republic of Iran, which we have been submitting for some time in order to shed light on this terrorist attack.

For our Government, the new role of developing countries requires the design of an international architecture in finance and trade matters that is oriented towards inclusive, sustainable and balanced economic growth. In that context, Argentina reaffirms its determination to integrate with the world by building bridges with the international community. We have demonstrated that by taking on the responsibilities of hosting the eleventh Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) next December in Buenos Aires and the presidency of the Group of 20 Summit in 2018, among others. We maintain our commitment to achieving positive outcomes at the Ministerial Conference, which should reaffirm the importance of the multilateral trade system, and of the WTO as its keystone. It should also ensure that the benefits of free trade reach all those who seek development, the creation of jobs, the eradication of poverty and the correction of trade distortions, particularly in relation to global agriculture and livestock markets.

The South American Common Market is our main tool for entering the international market. We know that in the twenty-first century we cannot achieve development in our countries individually, just as we cannot do so in our personal lives. Nothing can be done alone, and we are always in need of others to enrich our projects and our lives. We must strengthen our capacities and resources and establish the foundation we need for growth. The current global situation presents challenges to us that confirm Argentina's decision to expand trade and improve our profile as a country for investment. That has led us to establish a Southern Common Market in accordance with focused regionalism to attract investments and to strengthen participation in global value chains, which will have special emphasis and effect on small and medium-sized enterprises, generating more and better jobs. That is why we have strongly encouraged negotiations with the European Union, and those negotiations are entering their final phase. We are also negotiating with the European Free Trade Association, and we will soon be doing the same with Canada and with the Republic of Korea. We have also intensified our links with the Pacific Alliance, with Japan and with New Zealand.

Argentina's international cooperation operates through the Argentine Fund for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, which is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary this year and is a fundamental foreign policy mechanism that makes it possible for us to align ourselves in solidarity and in a horizontal fashion with other States. We need to update our strategies to create links and relationships with other mid-level developed States. As a reflection of our vocation to enter the regional and international arenas, next March Argentina will be the host of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. We hope that that will provide an opportunity for debate and for the building of consensuses that will make it possible for us to achieve a fairer, more equal world.

Argentina reaffirms its commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations. We will continue to provide our assistance, especially in Haiti and in Colombia.

Argentina promotes its presence on the international stage with the aim of achieving better levels of protection and a sustainable and rational use of our natural resources, and we encourage all projects and all activities that improve the living conditions of the people living on our national territory. Care for the environment is a priority for my Government. Growth cannot take place in a manner that is out of balance with the environment. As Pope Francis warned, the pace of consumption, of waste and of change in the environment has gone beyond the resources of the planet. The environment is a collective good; it is the heritage of all of humankind, and it is everybody's responsibility. Protecting the environment should be a comprehensive part of the development process. It must not be seen in isolation. Argentina is committed to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It upholds that commitment and will continue upholding it with other

States parties in the preparatory process for the twenty-third Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in order to achieve concrete progress in the implementation of the Convention.

We wish to reiterate our legitimate and inalienable right of sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas. Once again, we call upon the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to renew bilateral negotiations, which will make it possible for us to find a peaceful permanent solution that respects the way of life of the island peoples and that is in accordance with the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Our Government has begun a new phase in our relations with the United Kingdom. We hope that that will contribute to the creation of conditions in which both Governments can sit at the negotiating table with a view to resolving this protracted sovereignty dispute.

Two years ago our Governments met in this Hall to add their voices to a collective commitment, which took the form of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taking on in a determined manner the targets and goals set by the 2030 Agenda will allow us to build a better world for coming generations. The progress that we have already made bears witness to the fact that focusing on people, as the Secretary-General requests that we do, is the only way to respond to our task.

The phase of history that we are living through is full of challenges and opportunities. I welcome the fact that in every corner of our planet there is a renewed perspective with regard to the vital, distinct contribution that women can and must make, provided that we bring feminine attributes into play. What am I talking about? I am talking about our natural tendency as women to unite in a world where disintegrating forces seem to be gaining strength and prevailing. We have a vocation for long-term vision when everything around us appears to be uncertain. We have the vocation of nourishing, of caring for others, of seeing with empathy, and of putting ourselves in other people's shoes. All of those are indispensable feminine qualities that we must put into play if we want a more equal and more just society.

Those attributes are indeed vital but, as we know, they are not the exclusive domain of women. Neither are we are the only people needed to reach the goals that we have set. It would be extremely counterproductive to sacrifice the contribution of any gender, tradition, religion or culture on the altar of our prejudices. We need everybody. We must all bear the enormous burden of ensuring that this stage of history will bear fruit in the lifetime of each individual. In that way, without excluding anybody who wants to contribute towards that work, we will achieve a global society that is more prosperous and, above all, more just and fair. Our work must be a work of love because justice and the quest for the common good are the expression of love in the public sphere.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Argentine Republic for the statement she has just made.

Ms. Marta Gabriela Michetti Illia, Vice-President of the Argentine Republic, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sassou Nguesso (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincerest condolences to the people and the Government of Mexico in the wake of the earthquake that was so devastating for that country.

On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to extend to the President our heartfelt congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I also express our gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Peter Thomson, to whom we pay warm tribute for the work accomplished. We also once again wish Secretary-

General Guterres every success in the fulfilment of his mandate.

I note with interest the great significance of the theme of this general debate. Indeed, focusing on people and striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet is a tremendous challenge that calls for a spirit of openness and responsibility on all our parts.

Humankind faces many challenges. Terrorism is spreading its reach daily. No continent is immune to violence perpetrated in the name of extremism and nationalism. The increased tensions on the Korean peninsula could lead to nuclear conflict on an unprecedented scale. The situations in Syria and Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the nuclear threat and the crises in Africa and other parts of the world mean that there is now a pressing moral need for peace, without which nothing constructive or sustainable can be built. That has always been our guiding light.

Whenever circumstances allow, the Congo has always seized every opportunity to uphold the ideals of peace and justice in Africa and across the world. It is in that context that, on 19 October, my country will host the next Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the seventh High-Level Meeting of the Follow-up Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The Summit will provide an opportunity to consider ways and means of resolving the various crises that currently afflict that part of our continent.

In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries in the Great Lakes region are confronted with various crises. I refer in particular to the Central African Republic, Burundi and South Sudan. In the case of the Central African Republic, the return to peace is moving forward apace. The Government and the people of the Congo are unwavering in their support for the people of the Central African Republic. The implementation of the Road Map for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, adopted in July under the auspices the African Union, should provide new impetus to the stabilization of that fraternal country.

Moreover, the search for solutions for an effective exit from the crisis in Libya as part of the mandate entrusted by the African Union to the Congo is unquestionably moving in the right direction. The holding of the fourth meeting of the African Union High-level Committee on Libya on 1 September in Brazzaville led to quite heartening progress. All major stakeholders in the Libyan crisis and members of the dialogue committees set up by the Libyans themselves travelled to Brazzaville during or just after the Summit. A final communiqué and road map were adopted at the end of the meeting. The commission for inter-Libyan dialogue has begun its discussions, and they will essentially focus on the amendment of the Libyan Political Agreement adopted in Skhirat on 17 December 2015 and the inter-Libyan conference that is to take place in Addis Ababa in December. From this rostrum, I would like to reiterate my country's resolve to continue working for peace in Libya. That is why I urge the international community to support the efforts of the Congo to strengthen initiatives conducive to a positive outcome for those various crises.

Undoubtedly, poverty will continue to pose a lasting global challenge until we break the cycle of dependence and dramatic contingencies that has been caused by disturbing changes of natural ecosystems. In that respect, the globalizing and interdependent nature of our response is undeniable. Beyond our differences, we must draw on the regulatory capacities of the great Powers, in conjunction with the search for adapted paradigms and more effective solidarity aimed at advancing the developing economies. Our global stability depends upon that.

In that particular context, Africa has been affected by the tragedy of emigration across the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, the forced displacement of populations towards more hospitable areas, as a result of climate change, gives a measure of the distress of men, women and children — all victims. It is a matter of concern to us all. We must take significant action in a spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding so as to contain those exoduses towards uncertainty and save the lives of thousands of Africans.

As a truly global issue, the climate was the subject of promising discussions regarding its future at the Paris Conference in 2015. It is urgent that the commitments made there be kept. For the collective consciousness of humankind, that is the place to express our compassion and solidarity with the populations that are victim to the harmful consequences of climate change. I refer specifically to the devastating effects of Hurricane Irma in North America and the floods and landslides in Asia and some African countries, particularly in Sierra

Leone. Once again, we must agree that the protection of the environment is a common and imperative obligation.

In that context, my country initiated the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin on the sidelines of the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The memorandum of understanding that was signed last March in Oyo, the Congo, marks the first step in the Fund's creation. That financial instrument aims to ensure a better quality of life for our people and protect the forests of the Congo basin, which is the second-largest green lung in the world after the Amazon. I invite the international community to support the Congo in that initiative aimed at protecting our planet from global warming.

A decent life for all also means allowing our populations to benefit from high-quality health care. The proliferation of counterfeit and sub-standard medicines is an increasingly serious threat to the world, particularly for developing countries. The expansion of that scourge brings to mind various carefully organized forms of trafficking that have helped to finance terrorism. According to the World Health Organization, counterfeit medicines lead to 800,000 deaths a year. Approximately 10 per cent of medicines in circulation worldwide are estimated to be counterfeit. In Africa and the countries of the South in general, that figure may reach 40 per cent, and even 60 per cent in some regions.

In addition to the efforts of the World Health Organization, vigorous action at the level of the General Assembly should be undertaken with a view to defining a comprehensive strategy to combat the peril. Advocacy in that area requires the constant mobilization of all countries, including sustained attention and substantial financial allocations. For our part, my country has engaged in the fight in collaboration with the Brazzaville Foundation for Peace and Conservation.

The Republic of the Congo is experiencing a period that is marked by socioeconomic concern for the drastic decrease in oil prices. Budgetary adjustments are now envisaged, with the support of international financial institutions. In spite of the dismal situation, the Congo continues its resolute march towards the consolidation of its democracy. More than ever, the virtues of constructive dialogue are being brought into play. An institutional framework was implemented after the presidential, legislative, local and senatorial elections. The stakeholders of the nation are exercising their rights in complete freedom.

Transforming the world into a haven of peace and prosperity is possible. We are given proof of that with every passing day. It is up to us to realize that goal, while leaving no one behind.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Congo for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Chile.

Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Bachelet Jeria (*spoke in Spanish*): I want to begin by sending a fraternal greeting to the people of Mexico, and especially to the relatives and friends of the victims of the terrible earthquake that struck that fraternal country yesterday. I also convey my sentiments to the victims and all those affected by the hurricanes that in recent weeks and days have caused enormous damage in the region and, in some cases, irreparable losses.

Those most recent catastrophes, caused by hurricanes more frequent and violent than usual — largely due to the warming of the oceans — remind us that we are at a key moment in the history of humankind, a defining moment that will have repercussions on our lives and on the lives of our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. While the challenges we face today are different from those that gave rise to the Organization 72 years ago, they are as relevant and as defining as those faced by the postwar generation.

On the one hand, the notion of development that has prevailed until now has been shaken by the

relentless reality of climate change. We can close our eyes and deny a reality whose devastating effects will become more frequent and intense, or we can assume our responsibility. Beyond reducing carbon dioxide emissions, that implies daring to transform our production models and rethinking the type of growth we wish to promote.

On the other hand, at a time when there is democracy in so many countries as never before, we see a citizenry that has grown impatient with institutions whose legitimacy has been called into question by corruption, inequality and inefficiency with regard to citizens' most urgent demands.

Finally, in an international scenario marked by uncertainty, another definition is required. We either let each State attempt to impose itself and take the greatest advantage of its position, or we work actively for common peace and stability by strengthening the multilateral instruments and cooperation. The fact that we are here today in this Hall, where so many have touted the strength of peaceful and collective work, requires us to look at the risks we face and take on individual and collective tasks, weighing the consequences of inaction.

Today I bring the voice of Chile — a country that has learned from its history, a country that has known pain, but also hope. Beyond its geographical location in the extreme south of the American continent, my country is in fact not far from the world. Quite the contrary, it is fully within it. We therefore know that many of the great local challenges are, and will continue to be, global challenges, and that each global challenge must also find a local response. There is no room for fatalism in the face of those challenges. Today I bring the message of realistic optimism. It is possible to reverse past decisions, overcome inertia and correct our path. That is true for small and large countries, be they in the centre or on the periphery.

The enormous strength of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is precisely that they not only propose a new approach to improving the living conditions of people, they propose that we do it together, based on the strengths of each country. Our commitment to national tasks is bolstered by contact with others. Faced with the choice of whether or not to join the fight against climate change, we have not doubted — simply because there is no room for denialism or selfish postures.

In line with SDG 14, on the oceans, and the Paris Agreement, my country has launched a national action plan for climate change. Among the measures already under way are the green tax on carbon dioxide emissions from fixed sources and the transformation we have made in the energy sector. Since the start of this Administration, non-conventional renewable energy has gone from 6.3 per cent to 17 per cent of our matrix, and our goal is to reach 90 per cent by 2050. That is possible, because we have already started the energy transition.

In addition, we have been active in the Our Oceans initiative. We have created new marine parks and marine-protected areas. Almost half of our exclusive economic zone is protected today, reaching the historic figure of 1,329,090 square kilometres under marine conservation.

While we have made significant progress in that direction, we are aware that we must address another threat to marine ecosystems — plastics. Year after year, 8 million tons of plastic make their way to the ocean, remaining there for hundreds of years and making a huge negative impact. To tackle that problem, we participate in the Clean Seas campaign of the United Nations Environment Programme. Meanwhile, at the local level, we will present a draft bill to ban the use of plastic bags in coastal cities within 12 months. That law will permit citizens to contribute to the protection of the oceans. We will thus be the first country in America to implement that type of law, and we call on other countries to assume that responsibility.

Additionally, it is now 30 years since the adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which enabled the ozone layer to recover. On this thirtieth anniversary, I would like to announce that my country has just deposited its ratification of the 2016 Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which aims to prevent 0.5°C of global warming. Chile thereby becomes one of the first countries to ratify that new agreement. But that is not all. With the creation of a network of parks in Patagonia, we have also added 4.5 million hectares of green areas, rich in biodiversity, which will now be protected by the State for public use.

That shows that it is possible to move forward when there is will, when the public and private worlds join forces. Sustainable development is not a desire

impossible to finance. On the contrary, it is the best way for economic activity to be sustained over time.

But as I said at the beginning of my remarks, this is not the only dilemma. We also share pressing challenges in terms of democracy and inclusion. International experience has helped us and alerted us to the need to take charge of improving our democratic institutions, as well as transparency and probity in both politics and business, putting a brake on corruption.

The President took the Chair.

In that connection, we substantially modified the electoral system that we inherited from the dictatorship, making it more proportional and inclusive and guaranteeing a minimum quota of 40 per cent for female candidates. Along with that, we made changes to the regulations that govern the financing of electoral campaigns and political parties so that money does not define the outcome of elections. And we are in the process of a participatory drafting of a new constitution that is more modern and democratic.

But we understand that strengthening our democracy is not enough if we do not respond to the demand for greater individual liberties and rights for people. That is why we have made decisive progress in expanding sexual and reproductive freedoms and rights. Of course, that movement towards higher levels of individual freedom must be accompanied by social policies that promote equality and solidarity and expand people's capacities. That is why education is at the heart of our reforms.

In less than four years, we have implemented important changes to ensure, on the one hand, that people will have the education they need and deserve, regardless of their socioeconomic situation, and, on the other, that Chile can count on professionals and technicians in the most important areas for its development. We have done that by enacting reforms from nursery school to higher education, and we have put public education at the centre of that movement. We are gradually increasing access to free education, first for lower-income families — next year, 60 per cent of our students will be have access to higher education free of charge — and then for the entire population.

That is our way of promoting the idea that there can be no individual progress without collective progress, that there can be no lasting well-being where a few privileged groups become disconnected from the most disadvantaged. That is our way of realizing that well-being must be founded on a common link and universal values in order to become a reality.

Lastly, with regard to the third definition we are called upon to understand, I unreservedly state that Chile maintains an unchanging strategic understanding of peace, democracy, human rights and the rights of migrants, and free trade. For that reason, I cannot help but mention the situation of our brother country Venezuela. Chile, together with 11 countries in the region, has called for credible dialogue between the Government and the opposition. We are prepared to play the role that Venezuelans deem appropriate in order to achieve good results in a peaceful, political and democratic manner.

In the same vein, we are not the only ones to express our concern about the threats to peace in different parts of the world, such as the Middle East and areas of Africa and Eastern Europe, in particular with regard to the insistence on the use of nuclear weapons, which tests the very limits of peaceful coexistence. As we have publicly indicated, we hope that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will stop the nuclear tests, comply with the resolutions of the Security Council, contribute to guaranteeing lasting stability in North-East Asia and agree to resolve the situation through peaceful diplomatic and political channels.

In that context, we actively participated in negotiations for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which we signed this morning. That historic act creates a standard that sets the basis for future negotiations, making it possible to completely eliminate nuclear weapons in a verifiable, irreversible manner.

Along with that, I wish to express our pride and satisfaction at having participated for 13 years, with more than 12,000 men and women, in the troop and police contingents of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. We have renewed our commitment to continuing to participate in cooperation with our specialized police in the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti. Furthermore, as part of our policy on cooperation for development, Haiti has been made a priority partner, like the Caribbean and Central America, in programmes to improve institutions, security, enterprise and professional training.

Along the same lines, I also wish to highlight the participation of Chilean observers in the peace process

in Colombia, who are wrapping up the first special political mission and initiating the transition to the second. Chile also participated in the first stage of the process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and we are now participating as a garantor in conversations between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army.

We do not believe only in the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes, but also in the enormous opportunities opened up by trade. We have worked intensely with our bilateral partners and with the Pacific Alliance to create what we call convergence in diversity. Latin American countries should come together on the basis of that which unites us instead of dwelling on our differences. That is to say, on each and every issue that pertains to international coexistence, we have affirmed, and will continue to reaffirm, our commitment to multilateralism and the existence of rules that guarantee the fair treatment of each country.

Like other middle-income countries, my country faces major short- and medium-term challenges. That is why we value the multidimensional vision for development set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which recognize the differences between countries and gaps in development that are obscured when the only measurement of development is per capita income.

Yet it appears that we are facing a contradiction. Middle-income countries, including many small island developing States in the Caribbean, are being graduated by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development solely for having passed the per-capita income criterion. Where, then, is the multidimensional criterion of the 2030 Agenda?

Faced with that situation, Chile, together with other countries in the region, has spoken out and requested that a serious dialogue be initiated regarding the incorporation of multidimensional criteria in the definition of development. Together with Jamaica, we are launching a new initiative, the Resilient 20, which seeks to create an alliance to promote resilience in countries that are vulnerable to natural disasters, with a focus on middle-income countries but not limited to them.

Faced with the challenges presented by governance of the international community, I reaffirm the value of this Assembly and this Organization. That is why we support the transformations promoted by Secretary-General António Guterres for managing the Secretariat, which will facilitate decision-making in key sectors in both policy and administrative issues as well as promote confidence between Member States and the Organization. We have also supported the readjustments to the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General so as to make it more transparent and inclusive of all Member States. The long-awaited reform of the Security Council, to make it more democratically representative and fitting for the realities of the world today, is still pending.

The President took the Chair.

The world is seen differently from the South. While we still see vast sectors of our countries without access to the most basic public services, and when there is still hunger, segregation, precarious work and enormous inequality, there is only one conclusion: we have a long way to go for the agenda of solidarity to overcome the agenda of selfishness and indifference. It is true that some of those challenges are not exclusive to emerging countries — advanced democracies are also experiencing them. But the demands continue to be far more basic in the South. Chile has made major progress. In several areas we have reached standards that near those of developed countries, and we are proud of those gains.

However, there are still many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia that are facing histories of pain and frustration. We share with them a history of effort and hope that bonds us together in the present and the future. Because we have known scarcity, we know what it is to fight to break free of underdevelopment, as well as the fear of falling back into its grasp. We also know what it is to be a middle-income country with a healthy, solid economy yet with dramatic gaps in equality and opportunity for its inhabitants.

We therefore know at first hand the need to make changes, but also that change must come about through solidarity, which we claim not only for individuals but also for peoples. To share, cooperate and collaborate is the first step in societies caring for themselves, to regard the present and the future with greater certainty. Today it is true that the needs of the global scene are different, but they are urgent and require historic efforts from one and from all. We must cooperate on the level of each country on projects coordinated between nations

and guided by a clear agenda that inspires us all and to which we can all contribute.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Chile for the statement she has just made.

Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, President of the Republic of Latvia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Latvia.

Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, President of the Republic of Latvia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Vējonis: First of all, I would like to express my solidarity to the Mexican people, who are dealing with the aftermath of a devastating earthquake.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Lajčák, on assuming the post of President of the General Assembly at its current session. I am sure you will make our region proud.

The United Nations is, and will be, the central forum for multilateralism and a rules-based global order. This is the place where all nations come together to carry out our shared responsibility to deliver peace and security, advance human rights and sustainable development and cooperate for a better future. As the truly global Organization, the United Nations must be able to effectively respond to the serious global issues that we face: regional conflicts and humanitarian crises, the threat of terrorism, insecurity related to migration, climate change and poverty. Individuals and their need for peace and a decent life are at the centre of all those challenges. We must be able to deliver on those needs as individual nations and as the United Nations.

It is no secret that the Organization has grown too complex and bureaucratic to be able to respond swiftly to today's challenges. Some even question its credibility and relevance. Latvia also wishes to see the United Nations become more effective, more transparent and more flexible so that it can can make a positive, real influence for people on the ground. While the most recent global agreements have shown that effective multilateralism is possible, we must bring the values and goals of the United Nations closer to the people. The United Nations must preserve and, in some instances, regain, the trust of citizens and Member States in its ability to prevent and respond to crises and to promote a rules-based global order.

The new Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, was appointed on a platform of change. Latvia welcomes his appointment and fully supports his vision of a more effective United Nations. The Secretary-General's actions and ideas related to qualitative change and reforms in the United Nations are very encouraging signs. Reform is never an easy task, but with patience, clear goals and the cooperation of the United Nations system and Member States, reform is possible. The Secretary-General has our full support for his endeavours.

All people on the planet need peace. For people to fully realize their potential, a stable and secure environment is essential. In too many places, conflicts seem to have no end. The very basic principles of international law are violated, borders are changed by force and human lives suffer. Far too often, the United Nations has been unable to prevent conflicts, stop atrocities or build peace. Too often, resources are spent managing and responding to crises instead of preventing them.

The Security Council bears a particular responsibility for ensuring peace. Its members, especially the veto-wielding members, should move beyond their domestic interests in the name of genuinely addressing global challenges. People see the failures of the Security Council as failures of the Organization. We cannot expect trust in the United Nations if the Security Council does not deliver. Latvia also reiterates its call for reform of the Security Council, which is long overdue.

From his first day on the job, the Secretary-General has made a strong appeal for peace and the prevention of conflicts. We fully support him in that endeavour. Conflict prevention must be at the core of actions of the United Nations in order to keep situations of concern from spiralling out of control. Saving human lives and upholding human dignity must be our common priority.

Tools for prevention have long been available, including in the Charter of the United Nations, but we need to move from mere commitments to preserve a rules-based global order to actions to restore that order where it has been broken. Latvia will continue to promote democracy, good governance, human rights and the rule of law as key factors for global stability.

Security is truly a global issue today. In particular, Latvia is deeply worried about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. North Korea's actions have increased global insecurity. Latvia strongly condemns all nuclear tests and launches of ballistic missiles conducted by North Korea, as well as its continuous provocative rhetoric. We call on North Korea to return to a credible and meaningful dialogue with the international community and to refrain from any further action that would increase regional tensions. It is a priority to find a peaceful and diplomatic solution to that situation. In the meantime, all States must fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria, which blatantly disregards Syria's obligations as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is a deplorable crime that must be fully investigated. The perpetrators must be held accountable. Latvia has constantly called for accountability regarding those attacks, an accountability that is closely linked to the credibility of the whole international system. For that reason, Latvia has supported the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic to assist the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes committed in Syria. We will continue to support the Syrian people and the United Nations-led political process towards a political resolution of that bloody conflict, which has lasted far too long.

Global terrorism is one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The unwavering efforts of the Global Coalition against Da'esh have degraded the capabilities of Da'esh across all fronts. Latvia welcomes the important victories achieved, including the liberation of Mosul in Iraq. However, our fight is far from over, and we have to think about new strategies and secure new domains as the threat of terrorism becomes more asymmetric and globally dispersed. Besides military efforts, we must continue to disrupt the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, dismantle financing networks and counter online and offline propaganda that sets youth on a path towards radicalization.

We are pleased to see that the Riga Protocol on foreign terrorist fighters — the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism — entered into force in July. We encourage more States to accede to that instrument in order to address the threat at hand, which affects countries of origin and of destination.

International support will be required to help stabilize liberated areas in Syria and Iraq in order to allow refugees and internally displaced persons to return and start rebuilding their lives. Latvia provides training to Iraqi security forces and financial support for stabilization efforts.

Solving existing conflicts is essential for preventing new ones. We must stand firm in upholding the rules-based security order in Europe. The territorial integrity of independent States must be respected by all, including by the Russian Federation. Russia's unprovoked aggression against its neighbours is a serious breach of international security rules. There must be accountability for violations of international law for any aggressor that initiates or sustains such conflicts.

A peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ukraine and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are priorities for Latvia. Russia's continued aggression in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol cannot become business as usual. We support diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis under the Normandy format and within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group so as to achieve the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all the parties involved. International monitors must be granted access to Crimea, and human rights violations against residents of Crimea, including Crimean Tatars, must stop.

The United Nations, along with the relevant regional actors, should remain involved in, and committed to, facilitating the resolution of the protracted conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Last year (see A/71/PV.12) I stressed that the strengthening of the development and security nexus must become our mission. Our priority must be to achieve peace and a decent life for everyone, including the most

vulnerable among us. We must tackle the root causes preventing us from attaining sustainable development. If conflicts, hardship and poverty continue, migration and the flow of refugees will further increase. The far-reaching impact of climate change on global security cannot simply be disregarded. We must carry on with our joint commitment to tackle climate change so that coming generations can live sustainably on this planet in a sustainable way. Latvia is fully committed to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Now is the time to put in place the mechanisms of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That needs to be done at all levels — national, regional and global — in true partnership with all stakeholders. We welcome the current review of the United Nations development system to fulfil the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda. Next year Latvia will present a voluntary national review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Our national focus is to put people first, as that will lead to long-lasting development gains. Latvia is ready to share its experience with implementing the 2030 Agenda through development cooperation.

To enjoy peace and development, our societies need space and institutions for free, open and enlightened public debate where truth can be sought, knowledge shared and lies exposed. Such belief is also at the heart of our approach to countering purposeful and malicious propaganda and disinformation emanating from both State and non-State actors. Our answer to that challenge is to reassert the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and press and the independence of the media. Both nationally and internationally, we are committed to supporting the development of independent, professional, transparent and objective media and journalism, and to increasing the resilience of our societies by investing in stronger critical thinking skills, as well as media and information literacy.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Latvia remains a strong advocate of the multilateral system and believes in an effective and efficient United Nations, guided by the values on which it was founded. It is time for the United Nations to adapt to a changing global environment, focus on priorities and deliver results. The Secretary-General cannot do that alone. We all must work together to ensure that our Organization functions better and is fit for its purpose.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Latvia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Raimonds Vējonis, President of the Republic of Latvia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of South Africa.

Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Zuma: I take this opportunity to express South Africa's solidarity with the fraternal Governments and the peoples of the Caribbean following waves of devastating hurricanes that have resulted in loss of life, injuries and serious damage to infrastructure and property. Our thoughts are also with the Government and the people of Mexico in the wake of the earthquake that rocked Mexico City yesterday.

I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I assure you of South Africa's full support in the implementation of your priorities and responsibilities throughout your term. We also commend Mr. Peter Thompson of Fiji for his exceptional leadership during the Assembly's seventy-first session. I warmly congratulate Mr. António Guterres on his appointment as the Secretary-General. We also congratulateMr. Ban Ki-moon on his successsful tenure.

We have chosen an appropriate theme for this debate, given the challenges facing the world today — "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". The theme encompasses the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, humanitarian affairs and human rights, and socioeconomic and sustainable development.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), two years ago, in order to continue the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals marked a significant shift and historic moment in the life of the United Nations. We all committed ourselves to addressing the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment and inequality. However, a lot more still needs to be done to promote a more equal and just socioeconomic world order so that we can achieve the SDGs.

The current structure of the global economy continues to deepen the divide between the Global North and Global South.While a few enjoy the benefits of globalization, the majority of the peoples of the world still live in abject poverty and hunger, with no hope of ever improving their living conditions. Even within developed countries, the gap between rich and poor remains wide and is of serious concern. We need political will and commitment from global leaders to address the challenges and obstacles posed by the untransformed structure of the global economy, if we hope to achieve the goals and ambitions of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Those unequal and unjust economic power relations manifest themselves sharply in Africa. For example, our continent is endowed with mineral resources, but it still has the highest number of least developed countries. Many developed countries continue to fuel their development from the resources of the African continent.

The continent also continues to lose a significant portion of its resources through illicit financial outflows. Africa loses billions of dollars that it otherwise would utilize to develop the continent and to provide for education, health care, housing and other critical basic needs for the African populations.

Money laundering, tax evasion and tax avoidance, corruption and transfer pricing by multinational companies are some of the biggest challenges to economic growth and stability. They undermine the integrity of the global financial system, efficient tax collection and equitable allocation of resources. We appeal for the cooperation and commitment of every State Member of the United Nations and the international community at large to address that phenomenon. Developed countries in particular have a historical and moral obligation to contribute to achieving a fair global economic environment and to eradicate the scourge of illicit financial flows from the continent.

The United Nations should also play a central role in addressing this problem. We therefore welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 71/213, entitled "Promotion on international cooperation to combat illicit financial flows in order to foster sustainable development". It is a preliminary step towards a global architecture to tackle the scourge and impacts of illicit financial flows.

The issue of global peace and security continues to be one of the pillars of the United Nations agenda. South Africa reaffirms its commitment to cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, particularly the African Union (AU), in matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security. We welcome the continued support for the AU's efforts to resolve conflicts on the African continent through promoting African solutions to African problems and challenges. As Africans, we are doing everything possible to reach our goal of silencing the guns by 2020, as set out in our Agenda 2063, a continental blueprint for a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Africa. In that regard, we continue to make significant progress in resolving challenges to peace and security in our continent.

We hope that soon the sister people of Libya will be able to live in peace and harmony in a united and democratic country. In 2011, the African Union called for dialogue to resolve the crisis in Libya. Unfortunately, some of us present here opted for guns and bombs, and today those countries are making little effort to promote stability in Libya. The major focus and preoccupation has become how to deal with the flow of migrants arriving in Europe from our continent and the Middle East, which is a mere symptom. The war in Libya has contributed a great deal to the destabilization of the Sahel region all the way to Central Africa, creating a corridor for illicit arms trafficking and terrorist activities. In fact, had our warning been heeded that the supply of arms to civilians in Libya and the arming of civilians in Syria would cause loss of life, great instability and mayhem, the world would be more peaceful today.

South Africa continues to call for an immediate end to the violence and for a Syrian-led political transition and a negotiated settlement that reflects the will of the Syrian people. In both instances — of Libya

and Syria — we strongly cautioned against seeking to resolve internal challenges of sovereign States by imposing foreign solutions through military means. It is hoped that lessons will be learned from those tragic episodes in order to make the world a more peaceful place.

We continue our call for calm on the Korean peninsula. The situation cannot be allowed to get out of hand. As a country that voluntarily dismantled its nuclear-weapon programme, South Africa is of the firm view that there are no safe hands for weapons of mass destruction. The only viable solution to the problems of nuclear weapons is their total elimination, as expressed in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, recently adopted by the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. It can no longer be acceptable that a few countries maintain arsenals and stockpiles of nuclear weapons as part of their strategic defence and security doctrine, while expecting others to remain at their mercy. We are concerned that any possible accidental detonation would lead to a disaster of epic proportions.

We are making a clarion call to all States Members of the United Nations to sign and ratify the nuclear-weapon-ban treaty in order to rid the world and humankind of these lethal weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, we reaffirm the inalienable right of States to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as reinforced in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. South Africa is today proud to be the biggest producer of medical isotopes used in the treatment of cancer patients globally. We will continue to harness the peaceful uses of atoms in addressing challenges of socioeconomic development.

As we stand here, the Security Council is paralysed and unable to carry out its Charter responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. We remain steadfast in our call for the reform of that critical organ of the United Nations. We hope that the Secretary-General, working with the entire membership, can provide some impetus towards fulfilling this long-awaited ideal. Failure to do so will result in the United Nations irreversibly losing its legitimacy.

Mr. Biang (Gabon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We take this opportunity to express our empathy and solidarity with all the victims of the devastating hurricanes, monsoons, floods and droughts as a result of climate change. Those phenomena are proof that climate change is real and that, if we do not act now, future generations will suffer untold consequences. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is a milestone in the history of efforts to address climate change and all its consequences. We should resist all efforts to unravel and undermine the Paris Agreement. Our efforts should be directed at the mobilization of the resources required for its implementation.

For South Africa, the seventy-second session of the General Assembly coincides with the centenary of Oliver Reginald Tambo, who led our liberation movement, the African National Congress, for three decades in the struggle against apartheid and racism in South Africa. O.R. Tambo travelled all over the continent of Africa and the globe, mobilizing international support for the struggle against racial discrimination and the oppressive apartheid regime. He strongly believed in the role of multilateralism and in the centrality of the United Nations. It was for that reason that he spent a lot of time in the rooms and corridors of this United Nations building, mobilizing members to take firm action against the apartheid regime in South Africa. As we celebrate what would have been O.R. Tambo's one-hundredth birthday, we take this opportunity as a country once again to thank the United Nations and the international community for their support for and solidarity with our struggle for liberation.

If O.R. Tambo were still alive today, he would have pleaded with the Organization to do all it can to support the struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation and to support the struggle of the people of Western Sahara. The world has preached a two-State solution for the situation in Palestine, yet we have seen the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. We appeal to the General Assembly that the same resolve shown in supporting the South African struggle for liberation should be shown towards ending the apartheid practices against the people of Palestine.

We also wish to remind the General Assembly that the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination continues to be undermined, challenged and denied. The United Nations must remain seized with that issue, for the benefit of the people of Western Sahara and the African aspirations for integration and peaceful coexistence.

I also wish to register South Africa's disappointment at the decision of the United States Administration in June to reverse the progress that was made in the past two years towards ending the Cuban blockade.

South Africa stands ready to work with the United Nations to promote peace, human rights and sustainable development. As said by our liberation icon Oliver Reginald Tambo,

> "We seek to live in peace with our neighbours and the peoples of the world in conditions of equality, mutual respect and equal advantage."

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of South Africa for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Namibia.

Mr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Geingob: The President made a profound statement in saying,

> "The United Nations was created for people. Its job is to help people who are striving for peace and a decent life, on a sustainable planet."

Namibia congratulates Mr. Lajčák on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We pledge our full support to advancing a people-centred approach to doing business at the United Nations. We also commend His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson for his outstanding stewardship during his tenure as President of the General Assembly.

Yesterday the Secretary-General stressed his commitment towards global unity and multilateralism by saying,

> "We call ourselves the international community. We must act as one, because only together, as united nations, can we fulfil the promise of the Charter of the United Nations and advance human dignity for all." (*A/72/PV.3, p. 4*)

As the people of Namibia, we will do everything within our capabilities to support his noble cause during his tenure as Secretary-General of the Organization. We also congratulate Ms. Amina Mohamed, a daughter of Africa, for her well-deserved appointment as Deputy Secretary-General. Let us also not forget His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon and the sterling job he did during his tenure as Secretary-General.

Development that is not driven by the people and does not translate into improved living conditions for all people is meaningless development. Moreover, development that does not reach all people in an equitable manner will only undermine the peace and stability necessary for sustainable development. Growing income disparities, between and within nations, pose the greatest threat to peace within countries and globally.

We in Namibia overcame the inhumane scourge of colonial oppression and racial segregation. Through a deliberate policy of national reconciliation, we succeeded in entrenching peace, security and stability as the pillars of our democracy. We also made significant progress in reducing absolute and relative poverty during the past 27 years. Poverty declined from a high of 70 per cent in 1993 to 18 per cent in 2015. That was in part due to the introduction of a wide range of social safety nets that cover close to 16 per cent of the entire population. While income inequality also declined during the same period, it did not decline by the same magnitude as poverty.

We have come to realize that, as long as we continue to have poverty in Namibia, even if it is just 10 per cent, we can never have lasting peace and social justice. Similarly, as long as the wealth of the country is disproportionately in the hands of a few, we cannot have lasting peace and stability. It is for that reason that we have declared full-scale war against poverty and income inequality. We have also declared full-scale war against corruption, because corruption is one of the root causes of poverty and inequality.

In line with the belief that people must be at the centre of development, we have coined the phrase "No Namibian should feel left out". The logic is simple, for inclusivity spells harmony and peace, whereas exclusivity spells disaster, conflict and potential war. Therefore, we commend the President for his choice of a theme for this session: "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet".

In a climate of ever-increasing uncertainty and unpredictability, it is incumbent upon world leaders to renew faith in multilateralism. The United Nations matters most because it is at the centre of the needs and desires of humankind. Therefore, it must be inclusive by including Africa at the highest decision-making level. By failing to do so, the United Nations runs the risk of losing its respectability. The only sure way to restore trust in the United Nations will be for the Security Council to become more inclusive.

The people of Namibia can testify to the importance of multilateralism. Namibia is a child of international solidarity, conceived through the valiant struggle of Namibian patriots, delivered by resolution 435 (1978) and midwifed by the United Nations. Today, thanks to the support of the international community, we are an independent nation founded on the principles of democracy, unity, stability, peace and the rule of law.

People-centred development should not extend to only a small part of the population. It must cover all demographic components. Too often, the largest demographic component in our societies — namely, our mothers, sisters and daughters — are excluded from development. In Namibia, we believe that gender equity is equally important for a stable and harmonious society. A policy decision by the ruling party to introduce 50-50 representation at all party levels has led to a significant improvement in the representation of females to 48 per cent in Namibia's National Assembly. That is the second-highest level of representation on the continent and among the top five in the world.

To give further meaning to that policy directive, women have also been appointed to key positions in the executive branch. That includes the young Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minster — who is also the Minister for International Relations and Cooperation — the Minister and Deputy Minister for Education, Arts and Culture, the Minister and Deputy Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Minister and Deputy Minister for Urban and Rural Development and the Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration. Those are powerful positions.

Another significant demographic component that we must not neglect is the youth. We in Namibia value the empowerment of the youth. Many of the so-called older guard had been groomed and well prepared in the structures of the ruling party and the Government before they were assigned higher responsibilities. That practice continues with a number of young deputy ministers. Our Attorney General is one of the youngest in the world. Very soon, the last crop of the Tanganyika group — the freedom fighters of the 1960s, including myself — will make way for the new breed.

When we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and acceded to the Paris Agreement, we not only reaffirmed the centrality of multilateralism; we also reaffirmed the reality of climate change. What has happened in Sierra Leone, the Caribbean and some parts of the United States — and we must also note the recent earthquake in Mexico — serve as grim reminders that climate change is real. We have witnessed the stripping away of human dignity, security and hope. We must increase our resolve to address the challenges of climate change.

In order to achieve the ambitions of living on a sustainable planet, peace processes and international peacebuilding must be strengthened. We recognize the contribution of women in promoting global peace, both in peace negotiations and through their active participation in peace missions. Namibia supports efforts to increase the representation of women in peace missions around the world, especially in leadership positions.

Out of 52 United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, 26 are in Africa. Therefore, we recognize the institutional partnership between the Security Council and the African Union in the maintenance of international peace and security. The partnership not only enhances cooperation between the two institutions, but also adds greater legitimacy to the decisions taken by the Security Council regarding Africa.

Africa should not be seen only as a source of precious primary commodities but as an important and equal partner of the international community with concrete contributions to make. In that context, we welcome the recent Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace

and Security, signed by the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, which will enhance coordination between the Africa Union and the United Nations.

Namibia stands together with the international consensus that the Israeli occupation of Palestine must end. We reiterate that statehood and independence are the national, inalienable and legal rights of the Palestinian people. We join the call for the two-State solution to be pursued with renewed vigour and determination.

Similarly, the people of Western Sahara cannot continue to have their inalienable rights to self-determination and national independence denied. Namibia reaffirms its full and unequivocal support for the rights of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. We call for the urgent implementation of all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, with the aim of holding a free and fair referendum in Western Sahara.

Over the past several years, Namibia has been noting the growing rapprochement between Cuba and the United States, which culminated in the reopening of embassies in the two countries. We believe that those efforts should lead to the full lifting of the economic and financial embargo against the Republic of Cuba and its people, who have the right to pursue peace and a decent life.

Namibia is committed to supporting the Organization in its efforts to achieve global peace. As Albert Einstein once said, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved through understanding". Let us therefore try to be more tolerant and embrace diverse views through dialogue and understanding, before hastily embarking upon a path of force, which will lead only to conflict and, eventually, to war.

The United Nations is a great social experiment. It features small and large nations coexisting in peace and harmony. If the United Nations did not exist today, I would definitely call for the creation of such an organization. Let us continue to treasure the unity of the United Nations, for it is only through unity that we will bring about a world free from fear and conflict. It is only through unity that we will bring about a world free from hunger and poverty. It is only through unity that we will deliver a sustainable planet for our children and their children.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Namibia for the statement just made.

Mr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Montenegro.

Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Vujanović (*spoke in Montenegrin; interpretation provided by the delegation*): It is my pleasure to address the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to reiterate Montenegro's strong commitment to the values of the United Nations.

As one of the newest Members of the Organization, Montenegro actively contributes to maintaining peace and security in its region. Good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are at the top our foreign-policy agenda. We are strongly committed to multilateral cooperation and affirm our support for international organizations that contribute to peace and stability.

It is of great importance for Montenegro that it has become the twenty-ninth member of the North Atlantic Alliance. As a member of the Alliance, my country will continue to improve its cooperation and partnership with United Nations peacekeeping operations and with regional organizations dedicated to establishing and maintaining peace and stability. At the same time, Montenegro has proved to be a reliable partner of the European Union. Accession negotiations have already ensured significant economic benefits.

The international community is facing complex challenges such as long-term conflicts, terrorism and violent extremism, refugee crises, the systematic violation of human rights, and poverty. The United

Nations, which was established to prevent war and human suffering, should adjust more quickly in response to those challenges and adopt new mechanisms to prevent conflicts and resolve long-term crises.

The United Nations and international and regional economic organizations have new responsibilities today. Peace, stability, achieving sustainable and inclusive growth and improving international economic relations are the basic elements for achieving the goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is therefore of great importance to carry out the successful implementation of the process of reforming the United Nations — and its affiliates the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — in order to achieve more equitable economic growth, poverty eradication and women's economic empowerment, as well as to bridge the technological gap between countries and regions.

Montenegro remains dedicated to United Nations efforts aimed at implementing the ambitious reform agenda, including the strengthening of the role of the General Assembly and the enlargement of the Security Council, in accordance with the principles of equitable regional representation. Successful cooperation between Montenegro and the United Nations system continues in the framework of the Delivering as One initiative. Positive results of this programme are visible and recognized by many States Members of the United Nations.

Montenegro is part of a region whose experience has shown that dialogue and cooperation are possible and that they are the only way to overcome differences and achieve peace and lasting solutions to problems. Accordingly, early next year, we will organize a regional conference with a view to sharing our experience and helping to define new mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution.

Efforts aimed at preventing terrorism must be focused on its causes. That is the particular responsibility of the countries from which the terrorist threats emerge, but the international community should also offer needed help. We therefore highly appreciate the establishment, upon the initiative of the Secretary-General, of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which will enable strong leadership and a connection between the United Nations and its Members as they strive to prevent conflicts and terrorism.

Montenegro unequivocally supports the efforts aimed at the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons provides a foundation for the improvement of global stability. Montenegro has defined its national framework in this area by adopting a strategy of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction for the period 2016 to 2020, including an action plan for its implementation.

Montenegro strongly condemns the nuclear-weapon tests conducted by North Korea as acts that violate international obligations pursuant to Security Council resolutions. Those tests pose a serious threat to global peace and security. We support diplomatic efforts aimed at calming the current situation and call on North Korea to fully respect its international obligations.

Highly important multilateral agreements that have been adopted confirm that multilateralism is crucial and essential for achieving peace, inclusive sustainable growth and respect for human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Climate Agreement constitute a universal platform for transformation and progress. For their full implementation to be achieved, therefore, it is necessary to secure the utmost commitment of all Member States, as well as considerable financial resources.

Montenegro strongly supported the negotiations on a new international accord on climate change. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is a foundation for further efforts in long-term climate preservation. I had the pleasure and honour to participate, on behalf of Montenegro, in the historic Conference in Paris, when the Agreement was adopted, and to take part in its signing ceremony at Headquarters. As part of the efforts to mitigate climate change, Montenegro financially contributes to the Trust Fund of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Respect for human rights is a precondition for peace, stability and development. The full implementation of the international standards and norms relating to the promotion and protection of human rights is an obligation for every country. We are committed to the multilateral system for the protection and promotion of human rights, in particular among the most vulnerable groups, and therefore attach special importance to poverty eradication and the fight against discrimination.

We also attach special importance to strengthening the position and role of women in society, the prevention of violence against women, child protection and development and the fight against discrimination

of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex population and individuals with disabilities. We especially appreciate the joint initiative of the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and the launch of the global alliance to end trade in tools of torture and capital punishment.

I am certain that its improvement of human rights protection and respect for individuals renders Montenegro a strong candidate for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2022-2024. That was also confirmed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who said that Montenegro was one of 33 United Nations Members to send regular reports on the implementation of international agreements concerning human rights.

We attach special importance to developing key documents on refugees and migrants and point out the necessity of a comprehensive approach, while taking into account the development, humanitarian, security and human rights dimensions. Based on our experience and in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we are ready to make a concrete contribution to drafting two global compacts.

Its enormous obligation to offer humanitarian assistance to civilians in conflicts and natural disasters obliges the United Nations to reinforce mechanisms for humanitarian aid. Montenegro actively participated in the first World Humanitarian Summit, held last year. The Summit confirmed the need for efficient coordination of international humanitarian assistance. Montenegro has therefore invested significant efforts this year into ensuring that there are appropriate legislative and strategic frameworks for planning in place for managing and financing international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Finally, on behalf of Montenegro and on my own behalf, allow me to extend our congratulations to Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election as the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. His persistent commitment to dialogue and cooperation unequivocally confirms that he will be very successful in his high office. I would also like to express great appreciation to the former President, Mr. Peter Thomson, for his achievements in the work related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I take this opportunity to reiterate my most sincere congratulations to new Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. I am convinced that his rich professional experience, leadership and commitment will contribute to the work and results of the United Nations at this time when the world faces complex challenges. I also express my sincere gratitude to former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his overall contribution to achieving the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as well as for his support for Montenegro. I wish the General Assembly a successful seventy-second session.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Montenegro for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.